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SOLITARY MUSINGS.

Mrs. Rieley Thompson

33 - " Thompson, Mrs. Jane (Tonge),

1826

March 1st 1826

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SOLITARY MUSINGS.

IN SIGHT OF MOUNT VERNON.¹

Down the Potomac's broad and ample wave,
We float along in silence, for behold!
The Home of one whose name hath filled the world:
Of WASHINGTON! Who hath not heard of him?
Embosom'd in the pomp of leafy woods
It stands; a quiet home, yet draws all eyes
To gaze upon it, and with reverence.
Even the rude boatman ceases with his oar
To trouble the calm waters, and so break
That hallowed stillness; and the restless winds
Are hush'd to sleep; while the declining sun
Glides gently from our sight, its latest beams
Darting in splendour from behind the grove
Which overlooks his grave.

A simple mound of nature's purest green
Contains his sacred dust;—yet pilgrim feet
“From the four corners of the earth still come”
To pay their homage there. There late ²He stood,

¹ Written August, 1825.

² Lafayette.

The Stranger Guest, whom with such loud acclaim
The nation welcom'd—there he stood and wept.
Oh! may no hand profane disturb the dust
Of him who sleeps below; still may he rest
Beneath his own hereditary trees!
And *there* be shed the tributary tear,
And *there* the prayer be breath'd, and the warm wish
Be cherish'd, that the world had more like him.

But see those golden hues begin to fade,
And the wave shines less brightly; let us take
The pencil, and preserve the lovely scene;
Ere the tints die in darkness Vain the thought,
So swift grey evening follows the sun's flight!
Yet one who gazes now on this fair scene;
A stranger—and whose home is far away,
Shall keep remembrance of it in her breast
With all its natural beauties; and the thoughts,
Which crowd themselves into her busy mind,
Shall oft return, as wandering on the banks
Of her own native river, she may stray
“Indulging all to thought.”

ON THE GRAVES OF TWO BROTHERS, *Irish Emigrants.*

Wanderers from Erin's Isle, beneath whose skies
They first drew breath, and o'er whose dewy meads
Their infant steps first press'd the verdant turf,
Hither they came, in manhood's spring, to seek,
For what is dear to man—denied at home,
Fair competence, reward of Industry ;
And equal rights, at no proud despot's will
Given, or withheld ; and free to seek their God
As their forefathers sought him. And, perhaps,
They sought to find a *name* which should not die
When they were dead. Such, some of Erin's sons
Have found in this young world of Liberty.
And on her history's broad and ample page
They stand conspicuous. Many a page
Hath she to fill, and many a leaf to turn,
Yet blank, ere her high destiny be fill'd!
A beacon, and example to the world
She stands ! *The dread of Kings ; the hope of Men !*
If those, now laid in earth, had such a hope,
Behold its end, they came, and found—the Grave !

Perchance in their own land, they left a sire
Who urged them forth, to make themselves a home

In this free clime. Seeking the benefit
 Of generations to be born—his seed.
 Himself too old to leave his parent land.
 He, haply, seated by his custom'd hearth,
 Is thinking of his absent sons, and sighs,
 And almost wishes they had not gone forth,
 So much he feels their loss—Yet comforts him
 With the fond hope that all is well with them ;
 And dwelling on the years to come, his thoughts
 Are busy, picturing them successful still
 In all their projects. And, in fancy, sees
 Them full of life and health, as last he saw,
 When from his door they turn'd them silently,
 After their last adieu, to seek the port
 Where lay the stately ship, in readiness
 To bear them onward to the chosen land.
 Could he look here, upon these humble graves,
 And know what's laid within, would he not tear
 His aged locks, and cry “my sons! my sons!
 Would I had died for ye!”

But thou, who melancholy by their graves
 Dost sit, indulging pensive thoughts ; canst thou,
 Who numberest twice their years, canst thou believe
 Death is an evil? Death! which comes to all
 Or soon or late.

Alas! Alas! what is the happiest life
 When man's awake? But we have happy dreams

In youth, ere we have tried the world, or felt
Our happiness blown from us by a breath ;
Or found that life is all a disappointment.—
This bitter knowledge, those in the cold graves
Beside thee, never, never now, can taste.
And quietness is theirs, and peace, and rest.
Have they not happiness ?—Ah ! who has more ?

ON THE FUNERAL OF AN INFANT, *January, 1826.*

One tender blossom pure and pale, low in the earth
we laid,
And, bending o'er its span-long grave, with tearful
eyes we said,
“Rest little one, in quiet rest, beneath this foreign
soil,
The first of all thy race who *here* have ceased from
mortal coil.”

“ Far from the land where sleep thy sires, each in his
narrow cell,
And where thy kindred race *at home* continue still to
dwell,
In loneliness we leave thee here—unwilling so to
leave,
And as we bend our steps from thee, we turn again
to grieve.”

“ Grieve for thy destiny fulfill’d within so short a space,
And that thy transient sojourn here should leave so slight a trace,
That thou wilt have no part with us, in all that shall be done,
Around our hearths, or on the plain, beneath the pleasant sun.”

“ For this we weep”—but sadder thoughts had those who stood around
That little grave with heavy hearts, and eyes that sought the ground ;
They thought upon the parent stem from which that flower was rent,
And sure they deem’d her mortal share of life was nearly spent.

And stretch’d upon a couch of pain that tender mother lay—
Else had she stood beside the grave of her young babe that day.
And how to her, when they return, shall they of comfort tell,
And hope, when hope no longer in their own sad hearts can dwell.

Thy fear that soon again their feet that dreary path
will tread,
And soon another open grave yawn ready for its
dead —
They fear that soon the tree will lie, where lies its
fallen bud,
Mother and infant, side by side, in one sad neigh-
bourhood !

*"And there she dwells,
In her own native land she dwells, begirt
With growing infancy; Daughters and Sons
Of Beauty———"*

O Susan, couldst thou hear thy Sister's voice!
But she is distant from thee; far away
O'er the blue ocean's waves; and speech is vain,
Lost in the idle air. But could'st thou hear,
There scarce should visit thee an evening's breeze
But it should whisper thee. And it should tell
How one, a wanderer in the lonely woods,
Was thinking of thee, and almost believed
She was conversing with thee; as she wont
In her spring time of Life, when side by side
She rambled forth with thee, her pleasures still
The same as thine, her wishes all the same.
To tread the flowery turf, to scent the breeze
Laden with perfume from the hawthorn hedge;
Or to some distant field excursion make
To load our baskets with the Cowslip's bloom,
Then almost weep the ravage we had made.
Or on some holiday expected long,
When all our cares dismiss'd, our tasks fulfill'd,
With buoyant steps and joyous looks we'd go
And gladly leave the town with all its toys

And all its noise and novelties behind.
 Then when we reach'd some favourite spot would stay
 Our steps, and on the verdant bank reclin'd,
 Listen the distant hums, which from the Town
 Would come, at intervals, upon the breeze,
 Making our solitude still sweeter. And
 The pealing bells, which still were heard o'er all,
 Would come so mellow'd to us, that the lark,
 When he uprose above our heads, and sung
 His wonted lay, would so o'erpower their chime,
 That they were heard no more, until his close.

Sure thou rememberest those our childhood's days !
 And seldom dost thou walk the well known paths,
 So often trod by us, but thou dost think
 Of thy young life's companion, far away !
 I know thou dost, and it is sweet to know,
 There still is one, far distant though she be,
 Whose thoughts are of me in the stilly night,
 And in the rural walk : then best indulg'd.
 Nor yet to youth was our companionship
 Confin'd alone, we went together still
 Long after we had left our Parents' roof,
 And time had seen us wives——

We drank together long
 At the same spring, and scarcely did we deem
 It possible that time should e'er divide
 Two bound together by so many ties.

Sisters we were, our age almost the same,
One mother bore us, and one father rear'd,
In the same house we dwelt, in the same bed
We slept; together still—And when our hearts,
As nature will'd, had chosen other guides,
We still dwelt near each other, and could meet
For counsel: If perchance a cloud should rise
In our calm summer sky, our wonted love
Would draw us still together. *Why* we met
Not thought upon; our only wish, to meet.

But now between us roll the Atlantic's waves,
And long, long years have pass'd since we have met;
And time has brought no balsam to the wound,
Which, since we sunder'd, still remains with me.
The dearest hours I count, are those which pass
Distant from all, save memory of thee.
And in the woods I wander, till the day
Looks drowsily upon me; with a sigh
I bid thee then farewell, and homeward turn
With soften'd heart, and feelings sooth'd and calm'd.

TO MY FATHER, ON HIS EIGHTIETH BIRTH-DAY, 2d February,
1824.

My Friend! my Father! as this day returns,
My sadden'd mind is fill'd with thoughts of thee ;
Of thee, and home, and of thy gathering years.
Long since have pass'd thy "threescore years and ten"
And still thou art, and long mayst thou remain,
Thy Children's Cynosure—though one remote,
Must think of thee with tears—in secret shed.
For never more may she thy accents hear;
And never more thy Sabbath walks attend ;
Receiving from thy lips the precept pure,
As love of man and nature prompted thee.

Far, far remov'd she weeps, and still must weep
As busy memory wakes within her breast :
For she may never aid thy feeble steps,
Now unsupported by a partner's care.
O ! she would cross the seas, and cross the lands
Which lie between her and her native home,
(Those pleasant fields where first she drew her breath)
But ties as strong, which may not be unloos'd,
Her heart acknowledges, have bound her here.

And she has made a home—another home,—
 With strangers all about—strange scenes around.
 Not without beauty are those scenes so new;
 But in her heart they hold a lowly place,
 And one small flower sent from her native plains,
 Is dearer to her than the stately tree
 Covered with blossoms of this foreign soil.
 And dearer to her love and more esteem'd,
 One single line trac'd by a Father's hand—
 Than all the eloquence now pouring forth,
 By the great free-born Statesmen of this land.

Can I forget thee?—never!—I may lose,
 Nay—I have lost thee When my trembling feet
 Last bore me from thy sight; I lost thee then.
 And she who rests in peace (to the still grave,
 Called somewhat ere her time) she too I lost:
 The tender Mother, and the constant friend.
 I lost her then—for since—what have I known
 Of her? save—“she is gone the way whence she
 Shall not return”

But thou art still on earth—
 I trust thou art—yet, ah! we cannot meet,
 And trace what time has done for each of us,
 Since last we met. And many a year hath pass'd
 Since we *did* meet, and deeper snows I know
 Are scatter'd o'er thy head; and upon mine
 Already may be trac'd a hair or two
 Chang'd to a silvery white.—But let this pass—

The mortal part is chang'd, and still must change
 We know,—and be it so; but the regard,
 And the deep-rooted love I bear to thee,
 Can never change, let time do what it may.
 And thine to me, thy last born Child, I know
 Is still as warm, as in my sunny days
 Of Childhood, when I frolick'd by thy side,
 Or slept in peace beneath thy shelt'ring roof.

Did not thy age forbid it, I might hope
 Once more to meet thee “in the flesh,” and help
 To cheer thee on thy way. And join'd with those
 Whom “chance and change” have left about thee still,
 My brethren, help to smooth what’s left of life,
 And guide thy footsteps gently to the grave.

Sad though my thoughts may be, yet think thou not
 But there is pleasure in them, dearer far,
 Than what the world deems gaiety.

Yet am I sometimes gay, and oftenest when
 I lead my brother’s little flock abroad,
 In search of flowers or berries, through the woods.
 Thy Children’s Children, growing fresh and fair,
 Young scions parted from their native stock;
 Some thou hast never seen and one fair boy,
 Who bears thy name, I fondly think thy look,
 He is most dear to me.—Though England’s sun
 Ne’er shone upon his cheeks, they shame the rose.
 —And now I would be gay, but on this day,

Thy natal day, sad thoughts will still arise ;
 I cannot chase them from me. As I think
 How long the time is since I heard of thee
 And of thy welfare, Fancy will be busy,
 Picturing what may have chanc'd, in that dear spot,
 Where thou inhabitest. Since I have heard
 Those words repeated, "all is well at home,"
 "Three crabbed months have sour'd themselves to
 death."

The winds and waves, I know, have adverse been
 But the good ship in safety is arrived,
 Which should have brought me tidings—and brought
 none.

I once had hope, thou would'st have come and
 dwelt
 Here with me. And have left thy household Gods,
 And thy forefathers' graves, and made a home
 With me and mine. The hope was selfish, sure,
 For thou hast others very dear to thee,
 Around thy hearth, who would have mourn'd thy loss
 As I do now. But thou hadst long desired
 To see this land; where man may stand erect
 Before his fellows, and not be abash'd,
 Although the crime of Poverty, be his.
 And this thou would'st have seen; and equal laws
 Framed by all, for benefit of *all*.
All did I say—Oh no ! not *all*, not they

The sons of Afric, would I could forget
 Their injur'd race ; and leave the picture free
 From this foul stain—It may not, must not be.
 Ah, here thou would'st have seen, what would have
 made

Thy heart to sink within thee—man led forth
 For sale, barter'd for gold.—Wife, Children torn
 From him for ever. And they too in turn,
 As chance or whim directs, away are borne,
 To toil for other masters, where their steps
 Never before have trod.—But let us quit
 This painful, fruitless theme.

I'd rather speak to thee of the rich stores
 We should have found to please us, as we trod
 The silent woods, or “great Potomac's” shores ;
 Or trac'd some wand'ring rivulet to its source ;
 Or side by side have sat in yonder ¹dome
 List'ning to Clay's or Randolph's silvery tones.

Of thee I learned to love the lonely scenes
 Where Nature dwells—far from the din of men.
 And in my wanderings I have found the spots
 Where the first spring-flowers blossom ; flowers
 unknown

In thy familiar fields, and of strange forms,
 Such as arrest the eye of traveller, from
 The ‘olden land.’ And in the secret nooks,

¹ The Capitol, at Washington.

We should have mark'd the lonely squirrel play.
And many a shrub, and many a spreading tree
Would stay our steps ; and darting through the shade,
Birds of gay plumage, like a flash of light,
Would startle us. All these I would have shown thee.
While Summer lasted. And when Winter's rage
Should stay our steps from wand'ring, we would sit
And speak of days long past ; or turn the page ;
Or in the daily Journals search for news,
“ Latest from Europe” meeting first our eyes.

Those hopes I now abandon, and must leave
Communing with thee. Wishing thee, this day,
Health !—Peace, I know thou hast—“ that peace of
heart
Passing all understanding”—Fare thee well !

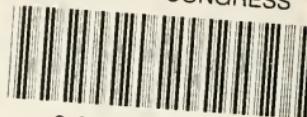
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